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Supreme Court Designates Ponomaryov's Congress of People's Deputies a Terrorist Organization

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A meeting of the Congress of People's Deputies. **Ilya Ponomarev / Facebook**

Russia's Supreme Court on Monday designated the Congress of People's Deputies, a Poland-based political movement led by exiled former State Duma lawmaker Ilya Ponomaryov, as a terrorist organization.

In its ruling, the court said the Congress of People's Deputies engages in activities "aimed at propagating, justifying and supporting terrorism." It noted that Ponomaryov, who chairs the congress, and executive council member Andrei Sidelnikov were convicted last year of publicly justifying terrorism.

The Congress of People's Deputies takes its name from the last Soviet parliament and seeks to form a body of former Russian politicians in exile. Organizers say the group aims to position itself as a potential transitional government should President Vladimir Putin be removed from power.

Its leaders, including Ponomaryov, former State Duma deputy Gennady Gudkov, and lawyers Mark Feygin and Yelena Lukianova, argue that their past electoral mandates give them legitimacy.

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The terrorist designation means Russian citizens who join or participate in the group could now face up to 20 years in prison.

Prosecutors labeled the movement "undesirable" in April 2023, accusing it of threatening national security and promoting separatism.

Ponomaryov, the only State Duma member to vote against Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, fled the country in 2016 after being charged with embezzlement. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, he has openly called for the violent seizure of power in Russia.

Russian authorities have since declared him a "foreign agent" and placed him on the national list of "terrorists and extremists."

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